

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13 AID-05 ACDA-12 MCT-01 HA-05
/117 W

-----004647 161524Z /23

R 160600Z MAR 78
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7108
INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
URQMKM/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 1682
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 1391

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PORG, MORG, SA, LE
SUBJ: ARAB LEAGUE MEETING AND ARAB DETERRENT FORCE MANDATE
RENEWAL

REF: JIDDA 1670

1. SUMMARY. WHETHER OR NOT ARAB LEAGUE ACTUALLY MEETS BEGINNING
MAR 27, AND WHETHER OR NOT QUESTION OF ARAB DETERRENT FORCE (ADF)
IN LEBANON IS DEBATED, THE FUTURE OF ADF WILL BE SUBJECT OF DIS-
CUSSIONS BETWEEN ADDRESSEE POSTS AND HOST GOVERNMENTS. SUGGEST THAT
POSTS MIGHT DRAW ON FOLLOWING FOR BACKGROUND INFO IN THESE DIS-
CUSSIONS.

2. WERE IT NOT FOR ADF PRESENCE IN LEBANON SINCE NOV 1976,
PRESENT UNEASY PEACE COULD NOT HAVE BEEN MAINTAINED. LEBANESE
GOVT HAS, UNFORTUNATELY, BEEN MAKING EXCEEDINGLY SLOW PROGRESS IN
REBUILDING THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE STATE, PARTICULARLY A TRULY
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NATIONAL LEBANESE ARMY. THE SITUATION HAS NOT BEEN HELPED BY
ABSENCE OF INTERNAL POLITICAL ENTENTE OR BY THE LEBANESE GOVT'S
FAILURE TO IMPOSE A NEW POLITICAL FORMULA. OBJECTIVE NEED FOR ADF
PRESENCE IN LEBANON IS AS GREAT TODAY AS AT ANY TIME IN THE PAST,
AND IT CANNOT BE STATED CONFIDENTLY WHEN THE SITUATION WILL CHANGE.
IN THE INTERVAL, LEBANESE POLITICAL PROBLEM COULD BE MARGINALLY
ALLEViated BY A GREATER WILLINGNESS ON PART OF PETRODOLLAR STATES

TO UNDERTAKE ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO LEBANON. END SUMMARY

3. REFTEL REPORTS SAUDI HOPE THAT ADF BE PHASED OUT AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE AND SITUATION IN LEBANON NORMALIZED. WHILE THIS IS VIEW WIDELY - PERHAPS UNIVERSALLY - HELD BY ARAB LEAGUE STATES CONTRIBUTING TO ADF, AS WELL AS THE LEBANESE THEMSELVES, IT APPEARS UNLIKELY THAT PRESENT UNEASY PEACE IN LEBANON COULD SURVIVE AN ADF WITHDRAWAL AT ANY TIME IN THE NEAR FUTURE. SOME FORM OF VIOLENCE IN BEIRUT IS AN ALMOST DAILY OCCURRENCE. ONLY THE PRESENCE OF ADF FORCES (PREDOMINANTLY SYRIAN), ALTHOUGH OCCASIONALLY HEAVY-HANDED, PREVENTS UNLEASHING OF UNCONTROLLABLE WAVE OF BOMBINGS, ASSASSINATIONS AND OTHER FORMS OF VIOLENCE. IN LEBANON, EVERYBODY HAS A GUN, AND IS PREPARED TO USE IT FOR HIS OWN ENDS.

4. UNDERLYING POLITICAL REALITY IN LEBANON IS THAT VIRTUALLY NO PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE IN RESOLVING THE LEBANESE-PALESTINIAN AND LEBANESE-LEBANESE POLITICAL PROBLEMS WHICH LED TO THE 1975-76 CIVIL WAR IN THE FIRST PLACE. ALTHOUGH ARAB LEAGUE SUMMIT MEETINGS IN RIYADH AND CAIRO OF OCT 1976 CALLED FOR RETURN OF THE PALESTINIANS TO THEIR CAMPS AND APPLICATION OF THE 1969 CAIRO ACCORDS, THIS HAS SIMPLY NOT OCCURRED, PARTICULARLY IN SOUTH LEBANON. EVEN IN BEIRUT, WHERE PHASE I OF "SHTAURA AGREEMENT" OF MID-1977 WAS THEORETICALLY "APPLIED," PALESTINIANS IN FACT TURNED IN ONLY SYMBOLIC NUMBERS OF WEAPONS TO THE ADF, AND THEY HAVE SINCE BEEN MORE THAN AMPLY RESUPPLIED THROUGH THE UNCONTROLLED PORT OF TYRE. AS LONG AS THE PALESTINIANS REMAIN ARMED AND ESSENTIALLY UNCONTROLLED, LEBANON'S CONSERVATIVES WILL LIKE-
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WISE KEEP THEIR WEAPONS, CONTINUE TO TRAIN, AND BE PREPARED FOR NEW HOSTILITIES AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE. CHRISTIAN MILITIAS AT THE PRESENT TIME ARE MARGINALLY STRONGER THAN THEY WERE WHEN THE FIGHTING STOPPED IN NOVEMBER 1976.

5. LEBANESE-LEBANESE UNDERSTANDING HAS LIKEWISE MADE LITTLE PROGRESS. ALTHOUGH IT IS WIDELY EXPECTED THAT PRESIDENT SARKIS WILL ANNOUNCE A NEW POLITICAL FORMULA SOON, IT IS BY NO MEANS CERTAIN THAT IT WILL WORK. THE PERENNIAL STRUGGLE FOR POWER BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MOSLEMS CONTINUES. MORE DEEPLY, THE MARONITE FRAME OF MIND TODAY IS NO LESS PARANOID VIS-A-VIS THE MOSLEMS THAN DURING THE WAR, AND THE MARONITES ARE AS DETERMINED AS EVER TO HAVE IT THEIR WAY; IF NECESSARY, BY FALLING BACK WITHIN THE CONFINES OF THEIR MOUNT LEBANON HEARTLAND. THIS WOULD BE EFFECTIVE PARTITION, WHATEVER THE LEGAL PARAMETERS. BY AND LARGE, THE MARONITES OF THE "LEBANESE FRONT" ARE MORE READY, WILLING, AND ABLE TO FIGHT, THAN TO MAKE CONCESSIONS FOR THE SAKE OF NATIONAL UNITY IF THOSE CONCESSIONS INVOLVE WHAT THEY BELIEVE TO BE THEIR VITAL INTERESTS.

6. THE POLITICAL CONUNDRUM IS IN SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP TO THE FAILURE OF THE SARKIS GOVT SO FAR TO ESTABLISH VIABLE STATE INSTITUTIONS, PARTICULARLY THE ARMY. THE FAYYADIYAH INCIDENTS IN FEBRUARY DEMONSTRATED GRAPHICALLY THE CLOSE LINKS OF SYMPATHY

AND FAMILY BETWEEN MANY ARMY OFFICERS AND THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS. ALTHOUGH THE ARMY LEADERSHIP IS NOW TAKING NEW STEPS TO ASSERT ITS COMMAND OVER FIELD UNITS AND CASERNES IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE COUNTRY, IT CANNOT BE REASONABLY STATED AT THIS TIME THAT THERE IS ANY IMMEDIATE PROSPECT THAT THE LEBANESE ARMY WILL EMERGE AS AN EFFECTIVE INSTRUMENT IN THE SERVICE OF THE NATIONAL GOVT WITHIN THE NEXT SIX MONTHS.

7. IN ABSENCE OF AN OVERALL MIDDLE EAST PEACE AND/OR THE DEFANGING OF THE PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON, CHANCES OF LEBANESE NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION ARE WEAK ALTHOUGH NOT INEXISTENT. EVENTUALLY, IT MAY DAWN ON THE LEBANESE THAT THEY WOULD BE BETTER ABLE TO CONTRONT THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM UNITED THAN DIVIDED. WE CANNOT SAY, HOWEVER, WHEN THIS MIGHT OCCUR.

8. THE MOST COMPELLING ARGUMENT IN FAVOR OF CONTINUATION OF ADF
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MANDATE, IN OUR VIEW, IS "WHAT IF"? THE STARK ALTERNATIVE TO THE ADF PRESENCE IS RENEWED HOSTILITY BETWEEN THE MARONITES AND THE PALESTINIANS. EVEN IF THE MARONITES WERE TO PURSUE AN ESSENTIALLY DEFENSIVE STRATEGY OF WITHDRAWAL, THERE WOULD BE ENORMOUS HUMAN COSTS ON BOTH SIDES. LEBANON'S MOSLEMS WOULD AGAIN BE CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE AND HAVE TO REASSESS THEIR OWN RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE PALESTINIANS, WHICH WOULD NOT NECESSARILY BE A PEACEFUL PROCESS. THE SYRIANS COULD THEORETICALLY WITHDRAW COMPLETELY FROM LEBANON, BUT THIS WOULD MOST LIKELY BE FOLLOWED BY LEBANESE MOSLEM DEMANDS FOR SYRIAN PROTECTION, POSSIBLY EVEN ANNEXATION.

9. WHATEVER THE RESERVATIONS OF OTHER ARAB STATES CONCERNING THE SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANON, THERE APPEARS TO BE NO VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO CONTINUATION OF THE PREDOMINANTLY SYRIAN ADF MANDATE. WITHDRAWAL NOW WOULD HAVE PROFOUNDLY DETREMENTAL CONSEQUENCES FOR LEBANON AND THE ARAB WORLD GENERALLY. THIS BEING SO, THE INTERESTS OF LEBANON AND THE ARAB WORLD ARE BEST SERVED BY GIVING THE ADF AS AUTHENTIC AN ARAB PACKAGING AS POSSIBLE. THE NON-SYRIAN ARAB PRESENCE IN THE ADF IS ALSO A FACTOR RESTRAINING THE SYRIANS THEMSELVES.

10. THERE IS ANOTHER WAY IN WHICH ARAB STATES CAN ASSIST LEBANON IN THIS DIFFICULT PASSAGE. ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, HOWEVER MODEST, IS A SORELY NEEDED DEMONSTRATION OF POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR THE GOVT. WE WOULD NOT RECOMMEND LEBANON AS A SOLID FINANCIAL INVESTMENT TO ANYBODY, BUT WE WOULD THINK THAT THE WEALTHY ARAB STATES COULD WELL AFFORD SOME MODEST POLITICAL INVESTMENTS IN REGIONAL STABILITY.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MEETINGS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BEIRUT01391
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780117-0678
Format: TEL
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780362/aaaacajp.tel
Line Count: 163
Litigation Code IDs:
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Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 0e2e4bc6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 JIDDA 1670
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3315377
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ARAB LEAGUE MEETING AND ARAB DETERRENT FORCE MANDATE RENEWAL
TAGS: PORG, MORG, SA, LE, AL
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/0e2e4bc6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014